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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 1313
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 2011
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001052

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

All media reported on the first day of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Israel. The media, taking their cue from Israeli public figures, are critical of the pope for what was generally described as a crime

of omission in his speech at Yad Vashem, as former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau told several media that, unlike his predecessor, the Pope spoke of millions of people killed and not Qmurdered,Q and failing to mention the identity of the murderers. Pope Benedict XVI received praise from the media for walking out on an interfaith meeting, which was used by Tayseer Tamimi as an opportunity for sharply criticizing Israel and accusing it of Qslaughter.

All media reported on PM Benjamin NetanyahuQs cordial meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh yesterday. Following the meeting, Netanyahu told reporters that Israel plans to renew the peace negotiations with the Palestinians very soon, but he stopped short of endorsing a two-state solution. Yediot reported that Netanyahu told Mubarak that that Israel will not allow the establishment of a second Hamas entity in the West Bank. HaQaretz reported that Netanyahu told Mubarak that he wants to resume talks on a deal to free Gilad Shalit as soon as possible. However, in an interview with Channel 1-TV yesterday, Mubarak spoke bluntly about the effort to secure a deal for Shalit. "You are talking about Shalit all the time, but you ought to remain quiet," he told the Israeli public -- and the press. "You demand his release and they [Hamas] raise their demands all the time. Keep quiet." In the interview, Mubarak also lamented the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, emphasizing that there would be no normalization with the Arab world Qwithout Israel giving something.Q IDF Radio quoted Cabinet Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer -- a member of the Israeli delegation Q as saying that the subject of Iran came up in NetanyahuQs meeting with Mubarak. Ben-Eliezer said: QOne simple thing is very clear to them: Iranian nuclear weapons are first and foremost a danger to the moderate Arab world. They are concerned about this, they are scared of this. I know that Bibi brought this up in full force.

Leading media quoted JordanQs King Abdullah II as saying in an interview with the British daily The Times that there will soon be an agreement -- or alternatively, another round of war, death, and destruction. Abdullah cited a peace plan conceived together with 57 Arab and Muslim states.

Maariv reported that officials in Jerusalem have received unofficial messages in the last few days from the U.S. saying that Damascus was neither ready at this time to sever its relations with Iran nor to restrict the actions of the branches of such terror organization as Hizbullah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Maariv cited a research paper shown to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman noting that in the course of Operation Cast Lead "senior Palestinian officials pressed Israel to take decisive action in order to topple the Hamas regime." Maariv quoted senior Israeli political officials as saying yesterday that this behavior is inconsistent with political and legal actions taken against Israel in Europe, particularly with respect to the International Criminal Court at The Hague.

HaQaretz quoted two Israeli analysts who will present their research on Tehran's missile capacity tomorrow as saying that Iran is currently capable of carrying out a conventional missile attack on Israel -- a substantial but not existential threat. The analysts consider Iran's missile arsenal its main deterrent and describe the country's significant investments in the area. The research was carried out by Uzi Rubin, former head of the Defense Ministry's Homa Project (code for the Arrow anti-ballistic missile system), and Tal Inbar, head of the Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies.

Yediot reported that a special ministerial committee headed by FM Avigdor Lieberman will examine filing suits in courts and international forums against Hamas leaders in response to Qassam rocket fire and terror attacks. The committee was formed in the wake of the suit that was filed against seven Israeli personages for war crimes in a court in Spain. The cabinet accepted Minister Yisrael KatzQs suggestion that Israel take a more offensive approach and desist from merely responding to suits that have been filed. Leading media reported that two Israelis were arrested for looting in the course of Operation Cast Lead on suspicion of stealing the credit card of a resident of the Gazan neighborhood of Zeitoun and using it to withdraw money in Ramat Gan and Bnei Brak.

Yediot reported that the international consulting firm McKenzie is recommending that the Defense Ministry reduce the staff of its purchase delegation in New York by 30%.

All media reported on last night's deportation of John Demjanjuk from Cleveland to Munich, where he will face justice for his alleged participation in the murder of 29,000 Jews in the Sobibor extermination camp.

Ha'aretz reported that El Al is considering suing the government for losses of tens of millions of shekels following the FAA's decision late last year to downgrade Israel's air safety level from 1 to 2, a ranking shared primarily by developing countries. El Al CEO Haim Romano told members of the Knesset Finance Committee yesterday that the downgrade had wide-ranging implications for the airline, such as preventing it from expanding the number of daily flights to the U.S., reducing its competitive power against U.S. airlines expanding their own service to Israel, and general harm to El Al's image. Romano accused the Transportation Ministry of transferring responsibility for the security failings to other authorities, calling it unacceptable that a body charged with supervising air safety would shirk responsibility when faced with shortcomings in that arena. Knesset Member Ofer Akunis, chair of the Finance Committee, said in response, "The implications of the FAA's decision are grave, both to consumers and airlines, and lead to higher prices

for airline tickets." Akunis also criticized the Transportation Ministry's handling of the downgrade, saying "more decisive action on the part of the ministry would have prevented the reduction of Israel's ranking at the outset."

1. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "If Jerusalem seeks to be a partner in molding America's Mideast policy, it must begin to understand that it is expected to present a comprehensive policy."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Rather than expecting Obama to deliver Israel prostrate, the King [of Jordan] needs to lobby the Arab League for essential improvements to its plan."

Block Quotes:

I. "Vision and Tactics"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (5/12): "King Abdullah II of Jordan is offering Israel a vision: peace with the 57 Arab and Muslim states. If Israel does not take practical steps to advance that vision, implied in the Arab peace initiative, the monarch fears a regional conflict in the next year and a half.... [Recent pronouncements by Abdullah and other Arab leaders] are crystal-clear voices testifying to the willingness of both the United States and Arab states not only to cooperate with the Netanyahu government, but to accept it as a responsible party that deserves their trust, despite its rightist character and proclamations during the election campaign. Most Arab countries also view the Iranian threat at eye level with Israel, and the U.S. administration believes a solution to that threat lies in reviving the Israeli-Arab peace process. The summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, on the eve of Netanyahu's trip to Washington, is intended to impress on the prime minister the understanding that the confluence of interests between Israel, the Arab nations and the United States demands a serious Israeli response, one that cannot be based on empty slogans, patchwork ideas or tactical gestures like removing checkpoints or economic cooperation. If Jerusalem seeks to be a partner in molding America's Mideast policy, it must begin to understand that it is expected to present a comprehensive policy. It's true that the impressive vision offered by the Arab states will not be easy to realize. To pay the heavy price, Israel needs

ideological change, along with openness on the Arab side, firm determination, preparation of public opinion and considerable trust. But these are the minimum demands of a politician seeking to create a better future for his country's citizens. It's a decision Netanyahu must make as he travels to meet Obama.

II. "Abdullah's Vital Role"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/12): QKing [Abdullah of Jordan] is a genuine moderate. His father made peace with Israel in 1994. In a region prone to shrill bullying, Abdullah prefers reasonable-sounding persuasion. And yet it is striking that all his recent pronouncements held hardly a hint of Arab self-criticism; not a word about what the Palestinians need to do for peace. The King naturally wants to end the Occupation. He claims the Arab Peace Initiative is the most important proposal for peace in the history of this conflict. And he warns that any Israeli effort to substitute Palestinian development for Palestinian independence is unacceptable. But the King surely knows that: Israel has no interest in occupying the Palestinians.... The Arab initiative, as it stands, is a fatally flawed take-it-or-leave-it diktat.... The Palestinians are hardly ready -- today, right now -- for total sovereignty. They are violently divided between the West Bank and Gaza. Fatah itself is polarized between generational factions. Palestinian political institutions are, shall we say, embryonic. Stamping the creation of a militarized Palestine would endanger both Israel and Jordan (a majority of whose population is Palestinian). The good news is that moderate Jordan can play a vital role in fostering peace.... Rather than expecting Obama to deliver Israel prostrate, the King needs to lobby the Arab League for essential improvements to its plan.... The King does an excellent job of making the Arab position seem reasonable. But he could better advance the cause of peace by helping to make it reasonable in practice.

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QObama's broad public support and control of Congress almost assures him a second term in office. Conditions couldn't be worse for Netanyahu's tricks.

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThe pictures with Mubarak at Sharm el-Sheikh, [Netanyahu's] aides hope, will persuade the White House that there is someone to talk to on the Israeli side.

Block Quotes:

11. "Why Did Bibi Cross the Road?"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (5/12): QPrime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's situation is reminiscent of the joke about a group of Boy Scouts who were so enthusiastic about doing good deeds they helped an old lady cross the road even though she didn't need to. Netanyahu isn't an old lady and U.S. President Barack Obama isn't a Boy Scout, but it seems the new man in the White House thinks he knows which side of the road Netanyahu has to be on. It's too early to tell whether Netanyahu has changed since his first term as prime minister a decade ago. So far he has been busy making contradicting statements.... Netanyahu, the expert on U.S. affairs who was partly raised in that country and went to university there, will have to acquaint himself with Washington's new politics. The days of former president George W. Bush are over. Israel's evangelical supporters and right-leaning Jewish lobbyists will also have to adjust. Obama's broad public support and control of Congress almost assures him a second term in office. Conditions couldn't be worse for Netanyahu's tricks. He has to change. So Prime Minister Netanyahu,

maybe it's time for you to cross the road -- on the double.

II. "On the Way to Obama"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/12): Netanyahu's first stop was very successful. Yesterday the Prime Minister met in Sharm el-Sheikh with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the two heaped compliments on one another. But at the final stop he can expect a much harder task: waiting for him in the Oval Office of the White House next Monday will be U.S. President Barack Obama, the person whom Netanyahu will have to persuade that, contrary to his image, he is prepared to hold serious negotiations with the Palestinians. Close aides to the prime minister admit that the meeting with President Mubarak was meant, among other things, to relay a message to the U.S. President that Netanyahu is not the same Netanyahu of a decade ago. Netanyahu's close associates are well aware that some of the American President's advisers describe Netanyahu as being extreme right wing, as untrustworthy, as misleading, and as someone who has to be pushed with force to join the American effort to promote arrangements between Israel and the Arab states.... Yesterday Mubarak and Netanyahu sounded closer than ever before.... As for the substance of the meeting, both sides continue to maintain different positions. Mubarak was unable to extract from Netanyahu a commitment to negotiate with the Palestinians on the establishment of a state of their own. In the Prime Minister's view, this is not a matter of semantics.... It is also clear to Mubarak that Netanyahu's real test will be next Monday. [Former Deputy National Security Advisor] Elliott Abrams assumed [last week] in his article [in the Wall Street Journal] that Netanyahu thinks of Obama as naive and unrealistic. That could be, but the Prime Minister knows that his political fate and even Israel's fate depend on the degree of trust that he wins from Obama. The pictures with Mubarak at Sharm el-Sheikh, his aides hope, will persuade the White House that there is someone to talk to on the Israeli side.

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